On Some Differences between TEAC and NCATE

In September 2003, Rod Paige, the Secretary of Education of the United States,[1] formally recognized the newly formed Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC)[2] as an accreditor of teacher education programs in the United States, thereby placing it on an equal footing with the longer-established National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and with 11 national, 8 regional, and 62 other specialized and professional accrediting organizations in the United States. The Secretary's recognition accepted the unanimous finding in June 2003 by the Department of Education's National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) that TEAC had complied with the Secretary's standards for all accreditors whose decisions enable a program or institution to receive federal funds.

Art Wise, President of NCATE, noted in an email message to his members that the recognition of TEAC by the Secretary of Education would constitute "a defining moment in the history of quality assurance in the teaching profession" and presumably also in teacher education in the United States. While the recognition of TEAC is a watershed event for American teacher education, some worry that two accreditors[3] in the same field would weaken teacher education, although that hasn't been the record in other fields where there is more than one accreditor. Nursing has Commission on Collegiate Nursing and the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission, business has AACSB – the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business and the Association of Collegiate Schools and Programs, and law has two accreditors that cooperate with each other in their reviews, the American Bar Association and the Association of American Law Schools. Multiple accreditors are in fact currently encouraged by the Department of Education recognition process. While the practice is recent, it initially gave rise to the fear was that there would be a Gresham's law effect in which lower standards would drive out higher standards. George Pruitt, president of Thomas A. Edison State College and a member of the NACIQI panel that recommended TEAC commented at the June 2003 meeting that "since 1992, when the regulations changed and removed the impediments for more than one accrediting body, the fear was that there would be accreditation shopping, there would be competing accrediting bodies with lower standards. In my judgment, the opposite has taken place."

The completion of an accredited teacher education program in the United States until recently has rarely been a requirement for the state's teaching license or for the hiring decision of any school district. This probably accounts in part for the fact that, despite having more than 45 years in which to become accredited, less than half the nation's 1300 schools of education are currently accredited. This, in and of itself, might not be worrisome if only weak and undeserving schools remained unaccredited. On the

---

[1] TEAC had been previously recognized in May 2001 by the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the body that recognizes all higher education accreditors regardless of their function as gatekeepers for federal funding. Only 43% of the nation's 82 accreditors are recognized by *both* CHEA and USDE.

[2] www.teac.org

[3] Actually there are three national accreditors in teacher education if the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education is included.

whole, however, some of the nation's premier schools of education have also not bothered with the prevailing system of accreditation. In response to this peculiar feature of US teacher education, the National Commission on Teaching for America's Future (NCTAF) concluded in 1996 that all teacher education institutions should be accredited, and while NCTAF did not contemplate TEAC, TEAC nevertheless claims that it also contributes to the nation's success with the NCTAF goals (TEAC, 1999).

The formation of TEAC might have been seen as a needed innovation and as a means to entice the majority of teacher education programs, who have until now ignored accreditation, to conform to the practice in other professions in which graduation from an accredited program is required for the license and subsequent employment. TEAC's critics (e.g., Gideonse, 1996 and Darling-Hammond, 2000) took a different approach and raised a number of questions about TEAC that require further analysis, especially now that TEAC is a viable accreditation option in most states.

TEAC developed an alternative method to the practice of accrediting schools of education because they conform to standards that are established solely by the consensus of key leaders in the field. TEAC's system of accreditation warrants, through an academic audit, that the program has an effective quality control system that has the capacity to monitor quality, uncover problems, and implement remedies for them (Dill, et al. 1996, Graham et al., 1995 and Trow, 1998). The program's quality control machinery is the heart of the accreditation process. The TEAC accreditation decision is based upon evidence that the quality control system functions as it was designed, one key test of which is that it yields evidence about the accomplishments of the program's students and graduates. The evidence must meet the standards scholars have established for evidence so that there can be no doubt about what currently is in doubt, namely, whether teachers have the knowledge, disposition, and skill their academic degrees indicate and their state license requires.

TEAC accepted two goals of NCTAF -- (1) providing each pupil with a caring, competent, and qualified teacher, and (2) ensuring that every teacher education program is accredited. In general, TEAC is in league, and makes common cause, with all members of the profession who would ground their actions in scholarship and evidence and are willing to simply trust the evidence in their decision-making (TEAC, 1999).

TEAC requires that every program ask: *Is there credible evidence behind the claims the program faculty members make about their graduates when they recommend them for the teaching license?* Upon what do the faculty members rely when they make the claim that their graduates are competent, and is the evidence upon which they rely strong enough to convince disinterested experts?

As time has gone on since TEAC's founding in 1997, the differences between TEAC and NCATE will probably prove to be of the same order as the differences that currently exist between the AFT and the NEA or between the SAT and ACT examinations. The differences will be largely political, because each uses different

means and theories to get to a common goal, in TEAC's case, the goal of public assurance that teacher education accomplished what it was supposed to accomplish.

There are some misconceptions about the differences between TEAC and NCATE, however, and some of these needlessly get in the way of the progress that must be made in the universal accreditation of teacher education programs. There are also some important differences between the two approaches that commend one over the other and a discussion of these follow.

Standards

It is fair to say that the formation of TEAC was a reaction to the pre-NCATE 2000 organization and that, subsequent to TEAC's initiation, NCATE adopted several key ingredients of the TEAC approach. Whether this was because of TEAC's formation, as many think, or independently of it, as NCATE claims, is an open and unsettled question, but TEAC's quality principles I and II are virtually the same as those subsequently adopted by NCATE 2000 in its standards 1 and 2. In fact the TEAC quality principles and standards are fully compatible with the NCATE's new six standards insofar as none are at variance with the TEAC system and all can be easily subsumed acceptably within it.

But in moving toward TEAC's principles and standards NCATE did not give up its traditional reliance on prescriptive consensus standards. In this resides a key difference between the two organizations. NCATE is prescriptive about what the evidence of student learning must and should be -- the education school, for example, must evaluate itself in terms its graduates' pass rates on the state license test (which is also what it reports on the Title II report card). TEAC makes no such requirement, especially in cases where the contents of the state test are only tangentially related to the program's mission and goals. In TEAC, the program faculty cannot simply overlook their Title II reports or any other evidence they report elsewhere about their program. They would have to show, if they chose not to rely on their Title II pass rates, that the pass rates were misleading (Mitchell & Barth, 1999) and/or that the tests were not aligned with their program's requirements and goals or with the better evidence they had about their claims of their graduates' competence. Even here TEAC makes no prescriptions about what the better evidence must be -- only that whatever it is, it must (1) meet contemporary research standards and (2) support the claims that the graduates are competent, caring, and qualified.

NCATE 2000, unlike TEAC, also requires that the program's claims and standards align with state, specialty group, and national standards. TEAC leaves the alignment issue to the program's discretion, particularly in those instances where the state's or a national agency's standards are in areas that are contested (e.g. the issues of the teaching of creationism, prohibitions against bilingual education, ideologically driven reading methods, atavistically narrow conceptions of scientific research, etc.). The role of state curriculum standards is equally problematic owing to (1) the great variance in the quality and content of state standards, (2) their inherent subservience to the cutting edge

standards of the university curriculum, and (3) the fact that reciprocity agreements mean that graduates are licensed to teach in several states, each with its own unique standards. The Council for Basic Education (CBE), the Fordham Foundation, and the American Federation of Teachers have not found consistency or comparable value in the curriculum standards of the various states (see Archbald, 1998 for an account of the discrepancies). Alignment is not possible or desirable in circumstances where the standards are not settled, and it is foolish to prematurely mandate alignment (Meier,1999, and Ohanian, 1999, 2000).

The same issues are found in the several national organizations' standards. TEAC has considerable respect for these standards, hammered out by consensus in various professional circles, but believes that each must be seen as a promising hypothesis that awaits confirmation or rejection by subsequent researchers and, in fact, by teacher education programs undertaking TEAC accreditation. In sum, TEAC makes no alignment demands on the program because state standards and national specialty standards have had such mixed reviews from the experts. TEAC encourages those seeking TEAC accreditation to research these standards as part of the TEAC accreditation process.

As NCATE moves in the direction TEAC setout, the differences between the two approaches to accreditation may look less striking than they did when TEAC was initiated. The differences may boil down in the end to what each organization accepts as evidence. TEAC makes no *a priori* requirements about the evidence except to insist that whatever is brought forward by the program meet scholarly standards.

NCATE requires that each program be subjected to a non-binding and somewhat gratuitous[4] paper review by the various specialty organizations with regard to their standards. TEAC argues that these standards, as well-intentioned as they are, have not yet been validated and that the "*paper review"* of them is an inadequate guarantee that the program actually met them. The TEAC position is that the field would be better off if the *paper review* were replaced by a TEAC-like process and by examining directly the evidence for claims about these standards. TEAC has repeatedly offered (e.g. most recently in TEAC's letter to the editor of *Education Week* of July 18, 2002) to adopt or require any such specialty standard in its own system, if its validity can be substantiated by available evidence.

The TEAC framework, however, is compatible with the standards promulgated by many state agencies and other professional educational organizations insofar as most groups, one way or another, require teachers to have mastered the components of TEAC's *Quality Principle I* and its three cross-cutting themes. TEAC's framework easily accommodates, for example, the five core propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the ten principles of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), the domains of *Pathwise*,

[4] It is gratuitous in the sense that the passing or failing of these program standards is nonbinding on the NCATE accreditation decision which is based upon a different set of unit standards that address a question different from the question addressed in the program standards.

formulated by the Educational Testing Service, and the six new unit standards of NCATE 2000.

The components of TEAC's *Quality Principle I* are themselves little more than a reworking and updating of the themes adopted by Project 30, a national consortium of institutions engaged in teacher education, initially sponsored by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) and the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences (CCAS) and funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. TEAC's overarching goal for the programs it accredits, as noted earlier, is taken from the National Commission of Teaching for America's Future (NCTAF) goal for the nation's teacher education programs.

The program faculty members seeking TEAC accreditation are free to adopt any national or state set of standards that speaks directly to the content of TEAC's *Quality Principe I.* They, in fact, are obligated to align the claims about the program with the claims they make elsewhere to state agencies and professional societies. To date those programs accredited by TEAC that have taken this course have had no difficulty establishing that TEAC's requirements were satisfied.[5]

NCATE, quite understandably, has sought to rebut TEAC's position on these consensus standards by arguing that accreditation in terms of them has benefits supported by research. Gitomer et al., (1999) showed in an ETS study that graduates of NCATE institutions were more likely to pass state licensing exams than graduates of non-NCATE institutions. The study, for some unexplained reason, also found that graduates of ACT-using institutions were also more likely to pass the license exams than graduates of SAT-using institutions. The NCATE findings, however, are only suggestive and inconclusive. The right study on the question would have contrasted the graduates from institutions that passed NCATE with those who failed NCATE, not with those who simply ignored NCATE.

The more problematic aspect of NCATE's stance on the evidence, however, is its failure to acknowledge other studies that show more equivocal outcomes. Another ETS study (Wenglinsky, 2000) that analyzed data from 40,000 prospective teachers from 152 programs found only five factors that led to higher scores on the licensure test. Accreditation was not one of the factors. In general this study found higher license scores were earned by graduates from programs in private institutions, universities, programs with larger numbers of traditional students, programs with ethnically diverse faculties, and institutions with *lower* percentages of students and budgets assigned to the teacher education programs. These findings provide uneven support for traditional teacher education or accreditation, and other studies, like Ballou and Podgursky (1999) found no support for the alleged benefits of traditional accreditation.

[5] Western State College in Colorado, Union Graduate College in Schenectady, New York, and Rockhurst College in Kansas City, Missouri each made the case, for example, that their adherence to state standards was the functional equivalent to the TEAC quality principles and standards.

A recent analysis of student's responses in the National Study of Student Engagement (Carini and Kuh, 2002) reported that students seeking to be teachers in NCATE institutions felt less well prepared for teaching than those from non-NCATE schools. This could be because they actually had some first hand experience with teaching, or it could signify a deeper problem. Education majors, as opposed to majors in other fields who intended to teach, for example, reported fewer enriching educational experiences and less interaction with faculty. Whatever the reasons, the literature and evidence, on balance, does not support unequivocally NCATE's claims about the benefits of its system of accreditation.

TEAC's deference to the evidence that the program faculty truly rely on to support their claim that the graduates of their program are competent has led some to conclude mistakenly that TEAC has no standards of its own or that each program gets to establish its own standards. This persistent mistake, recently repeated by *Education Week* (Murray, 2003), flies in the face of the fact that both CHEA and the Department of Education require that accreditors have standards. Both of these organizations have examined TEAC's standards and determined that its standards meet their requirements for standards and that TEAC's approach conforms to accepted practices in the field of accreditation.

Governance and legitimacy

There are some governance differences that also distinguish NCATE and TEAC. NCATE has representatives of various organizations on its board and panels, while TEAC has individuals who hold the same roles but do not represent any of the various organizations. TEAC does this so that its decisions are not in the interest of any constituent group and only in the interest of a quality accreditation decision. This a contentious point, of course, but most accreditors follow the TEAC model with regard to composition of their boards and panels. A diversity of viewpoints is essential for sound decision-making, but soundness is diminished when board members must also be faithful to an agenda that cannot be guided solely by the evidence and must be sensitive to the parent organization's agenda.

The governance issue is sometimes seen as a *legitimacy* issue on the view that accreditors derive their legitimacy from the fact that they represent the field. No organization, however, represents the full diversity of the field because no group is authorized to speak for *all* educators. The teacher education field, for example, includes the faculties in the arts and sciences, whose disciplines are taught in the schools. These groups have not been historically represented in the national accreditation movement in teacher education, despite the rhetoric that teacher education is an all-university enterprise.

The legitimacy issue, when cast as a sampling of beliefs from the field's constituents, remains unsolved as the field has not found a way to legitimize any person or groups of persons as spokespersons or representatives of the entire field. Legitimacy, rather than a "*who is entitled to speak for us* issue," can be re-cast as an issue of the

"*evidence speaks for itself*." Legitimacy, on this view, is derived from the quality of the evidence. The field long ago adopted the *blind review* of scholarship precisely because the quality of the evidence overrode the *legitimacy* of the researcher and the *legitimacy* of the researcher's institutional affiliation.

Diversity

A few groups, including AACTE, have expressed public concerns about TEAC's commitment to diversity, which is odd given that some founders of TEAC were civil rights litigators. TEAC (www.teac.org) requires that programs adopt the goal of "caring," which it defines, after Noddings (1999), as

> …a particular kind of relationship between the teacher and the student. It is a relationship between the teacher and the student that is defined by the teacher's unconditional acceptance of the student, the teacher's intention to address the student's educational needs, the teacher's competence to meet those needs, and also by the student's recognition that the teacher cares.
> TEAC requires evidence of caring, and it also requires the program's graduates …to act on their knowledge in a professional manner that would lead to appropriate levels of achievement for *all* their pupils. TEAC requires evidence that the candidates can teach effectively and do what else is expected of them as professional educators.

TEAC does address the racial and gender composition of the faculty in its faculty standard through rubrics that insist that the racial and gender composition of the program faculty conform to the institution's norm. Because all TEAC institutions are regionally accredited, the institutional norm is responsive to the national concern about the compositional nature of the faculty. With regard to the composition of the student body TEAC (www.teac.org) requires that

> Admissions and mentoring policies must encourage the recruitment and retention of diverse students with demonstrated potential as professional educators, and must respond to the nation's need for qualified individuals to serve in high demand areas and locations.

TEAC's intentions are clear in this area, and the widespread misreading of them is probably due to the excessive rhetoric that surrounded the announcement of TEAC's formation.

Program accreditation versus unit accreditation

Unlike TEAC, which accredits only programs, NCATE accredits the entire unit (e.g., the entire college of education, encompassing all programs, the sound and unsound alike). TEAC accredits only those programs for which there is evidence that their graduates are competent, caring, and qualified. Unlike NCATE, not all programs would have to be reviewed for TEAC accreditation, but only those for which the institution has evidence of success. The others simply remain unaccredited and accept the consequences of their unaccredited status. NCATE, however, requires that all programs, the weak and

the strong, be included in the unit review with the result that the programs for which there is not convincing evidence benefit undeservedly from their association with the overall accreditation of the unit. TEAC's system seeks to avoid these aggregation errors that are inherent in NCATE's unit approach to accreditation.

Lowering the bar

Some think that because TEAC respects the program's autonomy and mission that programs may take advantage of the freedom the TEAC system affords and lower standards. TEAC requires, however, that the ambitious claims made in the institution's literature be consistent with the claims made to TEAC (www.teac.org). TEAC insists that the faculty deliver on the high claims they make to the world. A program will not have evidence that their graduates are competent in the rare and unlikely event that they adhere to any low standards set in their promotional materials (*we prepare mediocre teachers and we have solid evidence of their mediocrity, so accredit us*). Because TEAC prohibits the use of only one measure of competence, the program faculty who inflate grades, or otherwise lower the bar, for example, will find that their grades will not be consistent with the other corroborating measures TEAC requires and the auditors probe (such as, standardized tests, portfolios, work samples, employer surveys, etc.).

There is a common standard all TEAC programs must meet, viz. (1) credible evidence of their common claim that their graduates are competent, etc., (2) evidence that the means by which they establish the evidence is valid, (3) evidence that program decisions are based on evidence, and (4) evidence that the institution is committed to the program.

While schools can claim their graduates are competent in different ways, e.g., that they are reflective practitioners, adhere to state standards (or some other group's standards), are problem solvers, experimenting teachers, etc., they must provide a convincing rationale that these differing claims mean the graduates were competent. And they must provide evidence to support the claim. TEAC makes a *tight/loose* argument -- tight on the TEAC outcome, loose on the program's means of accomplishing the outcome. The individual program goals are the program's means of reaching the TEAC goal that is common to all programs. Programs are free on the means but have no choice in the final outcome. They are free on the kinds of evidence they enlist, but not free with regard to the standards their chosen evidence must meet.

NCATE, incidentally, makes a similar argument for its system. NCATE schools are free to measure student learning by different tests or the same test with different cut-off scores, etc. They are similarly free to invent a conceptual framework of their own preferences and persuasion for the programs within the unit.

But is this accreditation?

In all the debate about TEAC, no one has ever doubted that TEAC's system would benefit a program. Having solid evidence for claims, verified by an audit, is

simply good in and of itself, and so far no one has doubted that. TEAC's critics, while conceding TEAC's clear benefits in this regard, have argued that TEAC's system has nothing to do with professional accreditation. TEAC's recognition by the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and by the U.S. Department of Education has settled that question to some extent. By virtue of that recognition, the TEAC's system qualifies as an accreditation system. In fact some (e.g., Ewell, 2001) have claimed that TEAC's system is one that should be emulated by other accreditors and that the TEAC system is on the cutting edge of the accreditation field.

William James observed that if a difference doesn't make a difference*, it doesn't make any difference*! In the end, what difference the differences between TEAC and NCATE will make to the field is an empirical question that could soon be answered if we simply let the evidence speak for itself.

References

Archbald, D. (1998). The reviews of state content standards in English language arts and mathematics: a summary and review of their methods and findings and implications for future standards development. Unpublished report for the National Education Goals Panel.

Ballou, D. & Podgursky, M. (1999), Teacher training and licensure: a layman's guide, In M. Kanstoroom & C. Finn, (Eds.), *Better Teachers, Better Schools.* Thomas Fordham Foundation.

Carini, R. and Kuh, G. (2002). What can we learn about the next generation of teachers from student engagement patterns in college, presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Teacher Education Accreditation Council, February 23, 2002, New York City, New York.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teaching for Americas future: national commissions and vested interests in an almost profession. *Educational Policy, 14(1)*, 162-183.

Dill, D., Massy, W.,Williams, P. & Cook, C. (1996). Accreditation & academic quality assurance: can we get there from here? *Change Magazine*, September/October, 17-24.

Ewell, P. (2001) *Piloting a New Approach to Accreditation in Teacher Education: An Evaluation of the TEAC/FIPSE Project (*National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Boulder, Colorado.

Graham, P., Lyman, R & Trow, M. (1995). *Accountability of colleges and universities: an essay*. New York: Columbia University.

Gideonse, H. (1998). Two accrediting agencies?*ATE Newsletter,* 31(5), May-June, 4.

Gitomer, D., Latham, A & Ziomek. R. (1999) *The academic quality of prospective teachers: the impact of admissions and licensure testing* (ETS),

Meier, D. (1999) Educating a democracy: standards and the future of public education. *Boston Review*. December, 1999 & January, 2000, *vol. 24*. (www.bostonreview.mit.edu).

Mitchell, R. & Barth, P. (1999). How teacher licensing tests fall short, *Thinking K-16*, vol. 3 (1), The Education Trust.

Murray, F. (2003). Accreditors in teaching now have equal footing, *Education Week, 23(9), 34-35.*

National Commission on Teaching & America's Future. (1996*). What matters most: teaching for America's future.* New York: National Commission on Teaching & America's Future.

Noddings, N. (1999). *Caring and competence*, In G. Griffin (Ed.) *The education of teachers.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 205-220.

Ohanian, S. (1999). *One size fits few: the folly of educational standards.* New York: Heinemann.

Ohanian, S (2000). Goals 200: what's in a name? *Phi delta Kappan*, January 2000, 345-355.

Teacher Education Accreditation Council. (1999). *Prospectus.* Washington DC: TEAC.

Trow, M. (1998). On the accountability of higher education in the United States, In Bowen, W. & Shapiro, H. (Eds.). *Universities and their leadership* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 15-61.